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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses principles of a Montgomery County (Maryland) program to train regular teachers in approaches to cross cultural assessment. The program originated because of overreferral of limited English proficient (LEP) students for special education evaluation and placement. The program stresses four major areas: (1) changing the teacher's attitude toward students who are bilingual and/or speak with different intonation/structural patterns through knowledge of applied and sociolinguistics; (2) helping the teacher acquire skills in distinguishing between "normal" and interference patterns and true language disabilities; (3) offering the teacher insights into the reading problems of linguistically different students; and (4) offering the teacher insights into linguistic problems of the LEP student which interfere with test taking. The county also stresses linkages between special education and English as a Second Language/Bilingual Programs which have helped LEP teachers identify potentially handicapped students and special education teachers understand linguistic and cultural differences which can account for "temporary" handicaps in LEP students. (DB)

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THE CASE FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN NONBIASED, CROSS-CULTURAL ASSESSMENT

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THE CASE FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN NONBIASED,
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In any endeavor which a school system undertakes, the teacher is often a key element. Therefore, one cannot even begin to contemplate a plan for developing strategies for the nonbiased, cross-cultural assessment of students without first considering the impact on teachers. Indeed, many new school programs fail because teachers have not been properly informed about new strategies, nor included in the development, given information about the need for change, nor trained in key aspects of the new approach.

It is chiefly for the above reasons that the Montgomery County Public Schools has embarked on an agressive program of teacher training regarding the needs and problems of the limited English proficienct (LEP) students in our schools. A secondary, yet major reason for training resulted from the discovery, almost two years ago, as data was being gathered on LEP students suspected of being handicapped, that an unusually high number of these linguistically and culturally different students were being referred by classroom teachers for assessment. After closer investigation following assessment by native speakers of the students' languages, it was found that in a number of cases, some students had been inappropriately referred. Adding to this, other data gathered also revealed that a number of these youngsters were being referred to the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESL) program for service, long after the student was proficient

in English and remdial reading classes, in some schools, were filled with LEP students.

A concern, then surfaced: could teachers who lack basic cultural, linguistic and sociopsychological information about language minority students be singling out such youngsters for assessment simply on the basis of their own ignorance? As Labov (1972) has suggested, teachers who lack an awareness of a student's linguistic system or cultural background may be at a disadvantage in measuring that student's competence or ability. He sees the problem of ignorance, on the part of teachers, to the rules of a youngster's language system as detrimental to the education of that youngster. Labov further indicates that the teacher who lacks insight into the student's grammar and vocabulary stemming from dialect may be at "cross purposes" in instructing that student. (p.35).

That teacher attitudes are crucial to the success of students, especially minority students, is well documented. Gottlieb (1965) has noted that his own extensive investigations have brought him to the conclusion that teachers play a decisive role in the achievement of minority students. He believes that the "culturally alienated" student is the one most likely to experience lack of support from teachers. This student is also the most likely to be referred by the classroom teacher for assessment.

Other researchers have also noted the relationship between teacher attitude and student performance. Two major studies were conducted by Carter (1970) and Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1966). Carter, particularly, found that the effect of teacher expectations on the self-esteem and academic performance of students is significant. He found that teacher expectations are derived particularly from information on cumulative records and other sources.

The key, then, to unlocking the issue of inappropriate referrals that were taking place in the Montgomery County Public Schools appeared to lie in changing attitudes, raising consciousness and arming the teacher with concrete facts and information about linguistically and culturally different students.

Four major areas then surfaced as worthy of attention in a training program. They involved the need to:

- Change the teacher's attitude toward students who are bilingual and/or speak with different intonation/structural patterns through knowledge of applied and sociolinguistics
- Help the teacher acquire skills in distinguishing between "normal" interference patterns and true language disabilities
- Offer the teacher insights into the reading problems of linguistically different students
- Offer the teacher insights into linguistic problems of the LEP student which interfere with test taking
- Develop linkages between the Divisions of Special Education and ESL/Bilingual Programs to promote a sharing of ideas, techniques and expertise.

Training in Applied and Sociolinguistics

The more teachers are able to characterize students' speech, note differences and pinpoint specific skill needs, the less apt they will be to refer linguistically different students for special education assessment. With this objective in mind, the ESL/Bilingual Division has developed a number of in-service offerings, incorporated the teaching of linguistics into its ESL Methods courses and taken advantage of every opportunity at local school and county-wide meetings to educate staff about linguistic issues in education. Following the research of Wolfram and Fasold (1974) who present a strong case for training teachers in linguistics, the Montgomery County Public Schools training program has encompassed these areas:

- Communication techniques for working with students of different ethnic backgrounds
- The nature of second language learning
- Applied linguistics for the classroom teacher
- Teaching standard English to speakers of nonstandard English
- Linguistics and the teaching of reading and writing
- Sociolinguistic aspects of teaching students from other language backgrounds
- Language proficiency assessment
- Linguistic difference and test taking skills

While language differences, per se, are only part of the problem faced by educators of linguistically different students, language problems still account for much of school failure according to

Wolfram and Fasold (1974, 178). By attacking the language problems first, teachers may find that students will perform better in class, thus eliminating the need for special education assessment. As Ferguson has noted (1971, 35), diglossia can be defined as those situations which create difficulty for teaching, because teacher and students are ignorant of each other's linguistic system. Teachers who are better informed about the student's linguistic patterns will be able to make better judgements about the ability and competence of these students.

Distinction between Normal Interference and Language Disability in LEP Students

At a basic level, students who come to an English, monolingual school dominant in another language will automatically experience normal interference factors as they move from one language to another, while learning content in English. Many students who appear to have aberrant speech patterns are simply exhibiting normal interference from the native language. Teachers can easily become informed about these normal interference factors in syntax and morphology such as lack of subject-very agreement, incorrect use of articles, omission of prepositions, wrong word order, use of wrong word or use of singular when plural is called for. The "normalcy of these interferences is noted by Fantini (1974) in his definitive study of a bilingual child's language acquisition patterns. Teachers, through in-service, have discovered that what they were labeling as "disabled" or aberrant speech

is actually normal for bilingual students. Teachers have then been armed with a standard for judging speech which is out of the norm. Table I illustrates some of the distinctions teachers have learned to pinpoint when teaching, observing, or evaluating LEP students. By employing a standard of linguistic interference in combination with a standard for language disabilities, teachers can make better judgements.

TABLE I

Language Disability Factors	"Normal" Syntactic Errors
• Confused sequence in relating an event or describing a picture	• Use of words with incorrect meanings; words incorrectly structured or verbalized
• Lack of interrelatedness of symbols or objects.	• Lack of plural when called for or use of plural when not needed
• Inability to organize or structure descriptions; "run-on" verbiage	• Lack of enunciation of apostrophe and "s" to indicate possession
• Delayed reactions and responses	• Incorrect word order, verb misplaced or articles misplaced
• Lack of spatial or temporal concepts	• Use of incorrect referent-pronoun agreement
• Inability to maintain attention	• Lack of correct verb tense and lack of subject-verb agreement
• Lack of age-appropriate vocabulary	• Incorrect use of the, those, these and incorrect agreement with noun
• Memory lapses regarding well-known words or objects	• Omission of preposition and use of "in" when "on" is needed, etc.
• Confused placement of words or phrases	
• Confused and "tangled" word parts or vocabulary	

Reading Problems of Linguistically-Different Students

Teachers often refer students for special education assessment who appear to be dysfunctional readers. This is another area the Montgomery County Schools found ripe for teacher training. As Shuy (1976) has noted, the "Mismatch of Child Language and School Language" may well account for reading failure among students who experience this mismatch, since "Functional language competence is asserted to be of much more cruciality to reading, particularly as it relates to teacher education, curriculum, materials, and cross cultural understanding."

Linguistic insights can also offer the teacher alternate resources and new vantage points, particularly for students with reading difficulties. Gumperz (1971) notes that many teachers, for example, are not aware that culture plays a crucial role in the decoding of referential meanings. Students from other cultures may continually be confused by mixed cultural referents. Labov (1972,20) indicates, as well, that "If the teacher is aware of these sources of confusion, she may be able to anticipate a great many of the children's difficulties." He suggests, for example, that in the early stages of teaching spelling to linguistically-different readers, it may be necessary to spend "...more time on the grammatical function of certain inflections, which have no function in the dialect of some of the children." With alternative solutions and methods for dealing

with the disabled reader in the classroom, the professional may feel more able to cope and develop programs for such students and be less apt to refer them for assessment.

A knowledge of linguistics, as related to reading can also be helpful in providing diagnostic information to the teacher in regard to the truly handicapped reader. Sound linguistic knowledge will contribute to a teacher's making important distinctions between a true reading disability and linguistic interference. Gumperz (1971,330) poses the question which all teachers should be trained to ask:

> Does this situation reflect real learning difficulties, or is it simply a function of our inability to diagnose reading aptitude in culturally different children?

Test Taking and Linguistic Problems of LEP Students

Wolfram and Fasold have noted that since standardized tests are geared to standardized language, a "disproportionate" number of bilinguals are "erroneously" classified as having "retarded articulation development." (1974,211). As discussed in the companion to this paper, "Toward Nonbiased, Cross-Cultural Assessment of Limited English Proficient Students in Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools," by Richard L. Towers, even when a test is administered in the student's native language, dialectical difference may also interfere, or poor translations may not

produce an accurate measure of the student's ability.

Teachers must be sensitized to the above and the fact that language problems can clearly interfere with the bilingual students' ability to take tests. Very often, that ability may mean the difference in placement, advancement, or "labeling" of a student. Since tests are geared to standardized language both in English and the native language, language minority students may not have a chance to demonstrate their real achievement or display an accurate measure of their intelligence. As Wolfram and Fasold (1974,207) indicate: "...all tests assume the testee's comprehension of the instructions, and the instructions are dependent upon linguistic comprehension of some type (whether oral or written)."

Training in the testing area in Montgomery County has involved the examination of various instruments, an analysis of the testing process, investigation of bias in language and alternate testing strategies. MCPS staff have been trained in alternative methods of assessment, such as the SOMPA (the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment) developed by Jane Mercer, or an alternate to I.Q. tests developed by De Avila, which uses Piagetian tasks to measure a student's innate abilities with minimal use of language.

Teachers have also been exposed to research into cross-cultural assessment and test bias. They have been exposed to research emphasizing

the need to develop accurate measures of language proficiency and dominance that are not culturally biased and take into account "normal" interference factors. For example, Lambert has discovered that while bilinguals do not perform well on verbal tests, when given nonlanguage performance tests, bilinguals fare much better than their monolingual counterparts. (1962). Bilingual children have an enriched environment, stemming from broader experiences which have not been fully capitalized upon in language testing.

Linkages Between Special Education and ESL/Bilingual Programs

As already discussed in the companion to this paper previously referenced, the development of nonbiased, cross-cultural assessment procedures were made possible in Montgomery County largely through the formulation of an interdisciplinary team. The marriage between Special Education and ESL/Bilingual expertise has produced a knowledgeable hybrid and a unique approach to solving the problems of the handicapped LEP student. Central to the marriage has been training in strategies, materials, methods, program placement criteria and diagnostic procedures used in each discipline. ESL/Bilingual teachers have become more knowledgeable about special education and special education staff more knowledgeable about ESL/Bilingual.

This training has enabled ESL/Bilingual teachers, who are the ones charged primarily with teaching LEP youngsters, to become more knowledgeable about the following areas:

- How long should a teacher wait before referring a LEP student?
- At what point can one distinguish a potential handicapped youngster?
- What are some special education approaches that can be used with youngsters in an ESL classroom?
- What are some of the earmarks or symptoms of a handicapping condition?
- What services are available for handicapped youngsters?
- Do all handicapped youngsters exhibit language problems? How are these language problems different from normal ESL problems?

In turn, special education teachers have learned more about linguistic and cultural differences which can account for "temporary" handicaps in LEP students and strategies which may be used to develop English as a Second Language within the special education classroom.

In summary, in spite of increasing national awareness about the legal rights of handicapped youngsters, and in spite of the recent number of major court decisions and federal regulations, the over-representation of minorities in special education programs persists. Mandates governing referral, assessment and classification of handicapped

students have not had as profound an effect as one might have expected. C.E. Meyers et. al. (1974) have noted that even with the strong impact felt by the Diana decision upon the use of intelligence testing to classify handicapped youngsters of language minority backgrounds, there are still a number of issues that remain unresolved. Hopefully, through more widespread teacher training such as is being conducted in the Montgomery County Schools, successful solutions will be found.

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